VARIETIES OF IRONY : AN ESSAY ON MODERN ENGLISH POETRY

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PREFACE
to the first edition

This is a study of a modernist mode which is so dominant that no truly 'modernist' poet could be said to lack it: irony. Though all great poets have tended to be ironic at one time or another, the 'modernists' have used irony more consistently and the ironic tone has become almost a distinctive quality of the modernist school. It has appeared to me a quality too persistent to be attributed simply to the temperament of individual poets: it has something to do with the spirit of our age - the scepticism, the cynicism and, above all, the mixture of intellectual with emotional elements in the seminal concepts of poetry. Best exemplified in the tradition of Ezra Pound and W.H. Auden, the mode has survived, if it has not been intensified by, the second World War and the changes which that war brought about (and the technological revolution with its consequences for the post-war world) so much so that most modern writers, consciously or not, use it in the best of their verses.

In re-reading the work of the 'modernists' I have been able to distinguish varieties of irony, all related to the cen-

tral mode but distinguished by differences pronounced enough to fit into separrate categories, or types. To illustrate these types I have used poems by five 'modernists' - Sylvia Plath, John Wain, Thom Gunn, Edwin Morgan and Philip Larkin - all different and all using different types. With the exception of Larkin, I have confined myself to a single poem from each which, I believe, illustrates the type more clearly. This does not mean, however, that the work of Sylvia Plath, for instance, is confined to the type discussed, or that John Wain does not use the type used by Thom Gunn; the poems chosen are representative of the types of irony not the poets.

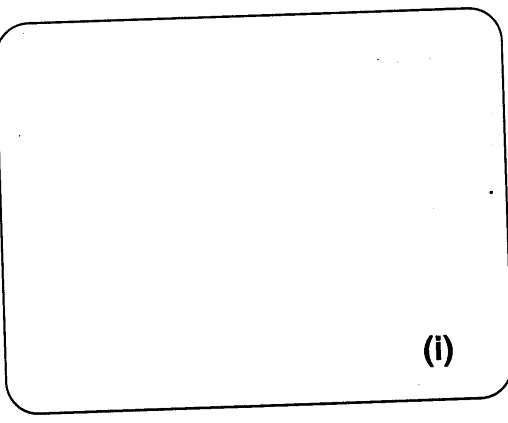
I begin by examining the meaning of 'modernism' (which is obviously different from 'modernity' with its implications of contemporaneity or newness) then, assuming that the reader knows enough about the traditional genres of irony, I proceed to discuss the meaning of 'tone', illustrating my discussion with brief examples. The following sections deal with the ironic mode as characteristic of 'modernist' poetry, relying primarily on textual analysis, with an approximately equal number of pages for each type (with the exception of the last). I allowed myself more space with Larkin because he is a major figure and his work may be regarded, in fact, as one extended exercise in the ironic mode.

I would like to record my gratitude to my colleague Dr. M.S. Farid who offered me unstinting moral support and provided me with rare or unavailable material as I worked hard over the best part of a year on this challenging essay. I hope that my argument will stimulate more work in this area in the future.

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VARIETIES OF IRONY



For nearly a century now Europe has been preoccupied with 'Modernism' [1]. Though born in the visual arts of the late nineteenth century, the term has grown in significance and its immediate meaning has had so many ramifications that one could start the inquiry almost anywhere. Just as each generation regards itself as modern, the early twentieth century poets emphasized their modernity. But while one can plausibly defend the modernity of Wordsworth's *Prelude* (a recent book presents a coherent argument in favour of this view[2]) or the definition of the modern mind as the critical mind that does not accept the obfuscation of the centuries of ignorance (as Matthew Arnold did, though the phrase is D.H. Lawrence's [3]) —

which is, incidentally, tantamount to Coleridge's 'inquiring spirit' [4] – one can hardly equate the two senses of the word. The nineteenth-century sense is epistemologically embedded in the Renaissance approach, often equated with the spirit of the Enlightenment. It may be ultimately traced to Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* and the consequent emphasis on the active role of the mind in dealing with the data of the senses. The whole trend of thought associated with that specific meaning will be found in every major writer from Shakespeare to Arnold. Man was beginning to recognize the eye of the mind as an active organ of perception and the mind itself as the sole arbiter in all matters relating to his life. Natural science was born in the seventeenth century and the philosophers were beginning to be conscious of the implications of studying nature in the light of Reason; and for all the 'revolution in taste' since Spratt's *History of the Royal Academy*, the human mind continued its progress through the metaphysical poets, the neo-classicists and the romanticists – almost linearly – towards a position of preeminence in the twenttieth century unprecedented in world history. But the other sense, the 'modern' sense of Modernism, poses a problem.

Though originally associated with a number of schools in the visual arts – the common sequence being Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Symbolism, Imagism, Vorticism, Dadaism and Surrealism – all 'subversions' of the realist impulse' [5], the term has

been borrowed (and finally 'naturalized ' in English) to describe the 'spirit' and the 'style' of modern literature or, to be more precise, the mainstream of contemporary literature. And the borrowing has brought in the expected confusion. As applied to literature it has come to mean both a revolt against Romanticism (which , in the case of the imagists, was true [6]) and a revitalization of it, as a host of recent scholars have maintained. The reader of the poetry and criticism of the early Modernists – say, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot – will note their 'fascination with evolving consciousness', and their insistence on the need to reconsider the whole question of the 'stability of consciousness itself [7]'. The poems and critical essays of all three men question and re-question the old Coleridgian precinciple of the 'coalescence of subject and object' and give a new meaning to 'experience'. 'Coalescence' is rejected outright as an imprecise 'romantic' term, the role of the mind is restablished as a co-ordinator, and the new meaning of experience includes that crucial term – 'intensity' (Eliot uses 'concentration' in his famous essay [8]). Strangely, the Romantics must be seen as the true precursors of this modern interest; G. Hartman, H. Bloom, R. Langbaum and Morse Peckham suggest a continuity into Modernism of the primary Romantic interest in all three areas – consciousness, self-object relationship and intensified experience[9]. We have heard even bolder voices, Kermode and Alvarez proposing that the intense activity of the Romantic spirit has remained central to the modern

arts[10]. And, again, in the face of the overwhelming evidence that the 'schools of Modernism' are anti-realist, Lucacs and his followers have argued that the truly self-realizing modern art must be seen as a species of realism[11]. Opinions will vary as to what Lucacs means by realism; for the presentation of artistic reality (reality as transformed by art) can be related in more than one way to actual reality; and referential art (which refers to immediate, actual or historical reality) cannot be always regarded as realistic (otherwise Pound's *Cantos* would be realistic indeed). Yet again, for all the attacks on symbolism by the imagists (imagism being the hard core of Anglo-American Modernism[12]), especially Pound's[13], major critics have insisted that the Modernists are symbolist at heart – so does Edmund Wilson in his *Axel's Castle*, and so does Maurice Bowra who includes a great part of modern literature as a symbolist heritage[14]. The association of Modernism with Symbolism has been sometimes carried to an extreme. Speaking of French Symbolism, especially of how Paul Valery, Mallarme's direct successor, explicitly indicated the shift in reading habit that Symbolism presupposes and how this shift eventually influenced the Anglo-American line, Cyril Connolly simply refers to it as the Modern Movement:

> The French fathered the Modern Movement, which slowly moved beyond the Channel and then across the Irish Sea until the Americans finally took it over, bringing to it their own demonic energy, extremism and taste for the colossal[15].

Connolly not only establishes this elsewhere denied relation[16], but also seeks to trace a continuity of symbolism after the second World War.

Modernism has been seen variously by the leading critics of today, because of its very nature. It may be truly a break with tradition as Herbert Reed says[17] but, might we not ask: with which tradition – social, political, intellectual or merely literary? It may be, or it may point out a chasm between present and past, as C. S. Lewis argues[18], but, again, should we not ask which past? Could it refer simply to human history, the literature, the arts of mankind, or to a certain tendency in that history? To use a bolder attack, are we referring in this context to human experience at all?

A catholic view of Modernism is that the insistence on aesthetic refinement – that is, the preoccupation with what I once referred to as 'form'[19] – involves the dehumanization of art, 'the progressive elimination of the human, all too human, elements predominant in romantic and naturalistic production'[20]. In other words, Modernism has been seen as an attempt to get behind the human passions, the human thought, and the human 'material' always believed (from Aristotle onwards) to be the only subject fit for artistic representation. To get behind it – yes, but substitute what? One of two contradictory extremes: the first, the form 'that makes life', 'the structure that lies beyond time, history, character or visible reality, the moral imperative of

technique'[21]; the second, the radical remaking of form so as, as Frank Kermode says, to bring it closer to chaos, so producing a sense of 'formal desperation'[22]. If, therefore, the relation between feeling and thinking on the one hand, and art on the other, is disrupted in favour of abstractions as many Modernist schools have done, or in favour of the concrete handling of objects *not human*, albeit in forms that embody vitål principles and techniques significant for man's life, then the essence of the Modernist trend must be moving away from human experience altogether; but this has been only partially true. The mainstream of modern literature, though not of Modern Art, has been characterized by an endeavour for a form which best reflects the peculiarly *new* kind of human experience; and the newness cannot be over-emphasized. Human experience is seen to differ *in kind* because it is believed to be the outcome of a new reality. There is a feeling that we belong not to the past but to an unusual, undreamt-of present characterized by the 'pluralization of world views'[23] and that this present derives its 'plurality' from the new social forms, the new political, economic orders and the new science of today. In inception this trend had been an eloquent response to a late nineteenth-century 'scenario of chaos'; it soon became the art of the 'destruction of civilization and reason in the first world war, of the world changed and re-interpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to meaninglessness and absurdity'[24].

Modernism became necessary when the Tradition was shaken to its foundation, with the 'disestablishment' of communal relations and conventional notions of causality, the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character, and the 'linguistic chaos that ensues when public notions of language have been discredited'[25]. We are therefore confronted with a new kind of human experience, intellectual and emotional at once, and it has to be reflected in a new kind of art. Wylie Sypher sums up this position by defining the style of an age as a conscious mannerism elected by some writers and artists, though not by all, which expresses

> a prevailing, dominant, or authentically contemporary view of the world by those who have most successfully intuited the quality of the human experience peculiar to their day and who are able to phrase their experience in a form deeply congenial to the thought, science and technology which are part of their experience[26].

Because of the absence of the old 'fixties' and the concepts based on the 'whole' and the 'wholesome', 'form' is said to have degenerated into formlessness, and order into chaos. But the chaos itself may be form: a repeated pattern, admittedly chaotic in inception, must in time gain the sanction of the 'receiver' and it eventually becomes a *new* form. The history of art is the history of how new forms evolve out of chaos, of how one form dies in the

process of developing into another. One kind of verse, for instance, which stands for a specific from, may merge into a nascent kind or give place to it entirely – but the principle of form behind it remains alive. The Symbolic poem may have died with French Symbolism, but Symbolism as a principle of form survives; the *vers libre* of Pound is rarely written, if at all, but the rhythms introduced by Eliot for his plays which owed much to Pound's innovations continue to be heard in many poems of today; and a good case may be made for the ballad, the epic and even the prose poem.

It may be argued that chaos is a feeling of modern times – a feeling that the 'controls' of the old world have been lost, that the modern world is simply chaotic. But in art chaos is never a governing principle. True, experimentation may suggest that the artist is consciously looking for new, or different forms to reflect what Bradbury and McFarlane call the 'bleakness, darkness, alienation, disintegration'[27] of modern times; but does not experimentation often lead to sophistication and perfection of new forms? Again, I. Hassan invites us to consider Modernism as an 'anti-formal' movement or habit of mind. He explores some of the continuities and discontinuities of Modernism, concluding that there is now a new post-Modernist mood which assumes a totally technological and dehumanized universe[28]. But, given time, cannot the variety of multi-media forms (the happening, the street theatre etc.) establish themselves as new forms with an

adequately solid backbone to survive the present apparent chaos? If the tendency today is to shock by 'violating expected continuities', by introducing the 'element of de-creation and crisis', the sense of shock must disappear as the continuities reappear and the balance must be restored between creation and de-creation[29].

Stylistically, Modernism has been so varied as almost to defy definition. The common factor often mentioned in current definitions is 'non-representation in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique and spatial from'[30]. Disregarding the differences between the media of the visual arts and the literary medium (language), critics sometimes make the mistake of applying some terms from painting to a poem without fully establishing the metaphor; 'planes', 'pattern units', 'colour' etc, are often put to good use, but you occasionally come across an unrealized metaphor where the terms borrowed are simply confusing. The confusion is primarily caused by the critic's inability to explain to the reader the ways in which a poem may be treated, say, as a painting. Applying the principle of non-representation, could the reader understand by the pronoun 'I' in a Modernist lyric the artist's eye blurring the colours or the contours (that is, the subjective eye) or the person, if it happens to be a person, painted expressionistically on canvas? What are the equivalents in painting for words which have definite and precise meaning in a Modernist poem? Could they be regarded as lines or colours or spaces – or perhaps as units

in a changing relationship or process?[31] If the 'process' metaphor is valid, are we to assume that all Modernist paintings are 'processal', continually changing, never restricted by contours and colours? Do not such 'processes' take place only in the mind of the 'receiver'? Should not this make the experience of looking at a painting or reading a poem so subjective and uncertain as to defeat a seminal principle of Modernism (best expressed in Pound's famous words about the 'hardness' of imagery), namely objectivity?[32]

Non-representation as a principle of style has its difficulties. Consider the following definition of Modernism provided by Bradbury and McFarlane: it is, they say, 'the movement towards sophistication and mannerism, towards introversion, technical display, internal self-scepticism'[33]. True, they all may be achieved in non-representational art, but are they not possible in Johnson, Wordsworth and Byron? And would not the following statement be equally true of Shelley: 'To the Expressionist or the Surrealist... it is the anti-art which decomposes old frames of reference and carries the anarchy of men's evolving desire, the expressive form of human evolution in energetic release'[34]? Only, of course, that Shelley thought that art could fulfil that task. To agree with Irving Howe that 'modernism does not establish a prevalent style of its own; or if it does, it denies itself, thereby ceasing to be modern'[35], is to defeat our own purpose. He may mean, however, that Modernism is less a style than a search for

a style in a highly individualized sense; and it is this individual quality that makes a generalized definition difficult.

I have attempted another approach based on the observation of a quality which, I have felt, pervades the work of most Modernists. It concerns 'tone' – that difficult term which, borrowed from music, has been accepted as a critical concept. What is 'tone'? Consider F. L. Lucas's analysis of the attitude of mind behind the styles of Dr. Johnson and Coleridge: his praise for the former and denigration of the latter are based on what we may describe today as 'tone'[36]. Johnson's letter to Lord Chesterfield is hailed as an example of high style because the writer is confident, proud and in complete control of his 'material'; the 'tone' had to appeal to classicist Lucas. Or consider Auerbach's distinction between the high and low styles of Latin Literature on the basis of tone – the high producing tragedy, the low comedy, the high characteristic of serious 'unrealistic' writing, the low of the humorous and 'realistic' [37]. Or consider C. Brooks's distinction between 'wit and high seriousness' as distinctive of classical and romantic moods respectively – also on the basis of tone[38]. Elusive as it may be, the 'tone' of a poem can be established: it is the result of the artist's attitude to his 'material' and is directly reflected in the style. 'Form', in general, is determined by tone; for 'form' never consists solely in the technical aspects of a given work. It includes the choice of material as well as the arrangement of every 'particle' of that material. And 'tone' can determine both.

Recent critics have not been unaware of the importance of tone, and many have pointed out some of the qualities of Modernism in terms of 'tone'. Going back to the definition given two pages earlier[39], we must see in the last of the qualities cited an indication of 'tone' peculiar to Modernism. 'Sophistication, mannerism and technical display' may be variously interpreted and will be found in much classical, neo-classical and romantic work, in Elizabethan verse as well as in Restoration comedy - but not 'internal self-scepticism'. The term qualifies 'tone' and is essential to any meaningful approach to Modernist poetry.

It was 'tone' which distinguished the work of the French Symbolists and dictated the need to reconsider the adequacy of language as a medium, thereby opening new vistas for a reconsideration of the whole question of creation (and de-creation) in Modernist literature. The 'acute consciousness of language'[40] in effect meant a distrust of language, a suspicion that it may be unable, after all, to transmit the new consciousness of modern times: it 'may be all surface, all verbalism'[41]. But while Wordsworth, complaining in *The Prelude* of the 'sad incompetence of human speech', proceeded to create a fresh metaphor of 'the imagination' drawing on resources native in his own language which still maintained his 'high serious' tone, the Modernists rebelled against those resources *because* they maintained that tone. The battle for the ironic aesthetic was primarily a battle against old tones. New 'con-

sciousness' required the manipulation of language, if not a new language; and as early as 1886 the Symbolists were showing signs of awareness that the battlefield *was* language, the object a new *tone*. In this 'Manifeste du Symbolisme', Jean Moreas enumerated some of the stylistic devices already used in the language of the Symbolists which helped to create their new tones:

> ..d'implués vocables, la période qui s'arcboute alternant avec la période aux défaillances ondulées, les pleonasmes significatifs, les mystérieuses ellipses, l'anacoluthe en suspens, tout trop hardi et multiforme;...[42]*

'Unpolluted words' foreshadows, of course, Pound's call for the use of words with definite meaning; but that was a principle soon abandoned. To create a new tone, to break the old fixed stances of the poet as teacher (Wordsworth), as legislator (Shelley) or as profound commentator on human life (Arnold) – to bridge the gap between 'high seriousness' (Cf. Milton's *Paradise Regained* or Tennyson's *In Memoriam*) and 'wit' (Cf. John Donne's *The Indifferent* or Pope's *The Dunciad*) new tools had to be found. The modern age is an age of 'multiformity', of diversity, of synchronicity – and only fresh and 'complex' tones

* ... unpolluted words, the period which creates a single supporting arch alternating with the period of undulent cadences, significant pleonasms, mysterious ellipses, suspended anacolution, a pervasive sense of extreme audacity and multiformity, ...

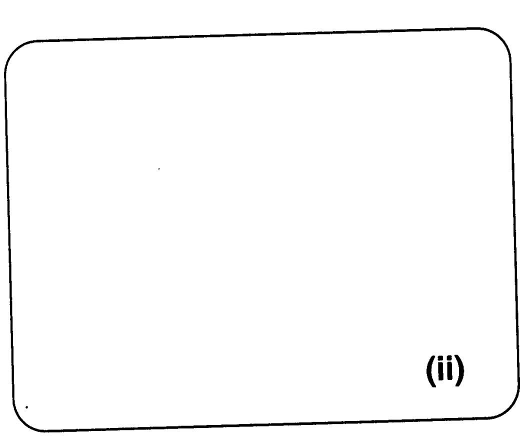
could adequately reflect it. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the truly ironic mode took long to evolve, that the new 'consciousnesses' expressed were ironic in a variety of ways insofar as they represented the artists' reaction to the Tradition and present-day realities.

The achievement has been remarkable, as Richard Sheppard shows in his 'crisis of language'[43], a short essay in which he relates the French, German and English attempts at the revitalization of language as an instrument of lodging forth the new consciousness to social changes. The revitalization of language is the task, however, of every original poet, the creation of new linguistic modes the task of genius. Linguistically, what the Modernists have achieved can hardly be comparable to that of Shakespeare or Milton; nor can the flippant tones of John Wain, for instance, aspire to the greatness of Byron's balanced use of the colloquial tone in his satires. But the Modernists' achievement lies in their discovery that language is not a collection of fixed *quanta*, that words and structures can be changed to generate a new tone, that without such a change no interpretation of the underlying chaos in the modern world (personal, social or physical) may be possible. Their search has been directed towards the most efficient means of 'depotentiating' language, to use Sheppard's word[44], so that the poem would cease to be a living voice 'talking sense' or evoking the passion of an acquiescent (or antagonistic) audience, but a group of voices commenting on one another, sometimes negating

one another, as they represent layers of consciousness often in conflict, occasionally in harmony. The audience would 'receive' very little: instead, they are invited to 'act', to relate the new language to old established patterns of thought and feeling. They are often jerked into sudden realizations – that what they hear responds not to the logic they know, the logic of fixity and permanence, but to a new logic, a shifting logic deriving from the shifting relations within a changing world; that the layers of consciousness evoked are concurrent insofar as man's consciousness is seldom that translucent medium pictured by the Victorian poets where one feeling predominates, one emotion reigns supreme; or that the image, as an object of compact analogy, is hardly an image so defined, that is, a representation of something (animate or inanimate) or a fusion of many elements, but rather an ambiguous relationship where tenor and vehicle often exchange places, and where the hidden meaning, read in the interaction of images, may be more important than the obvious one. These are the 'new tools' evolved for the ironic mode, the most distinctive tone of Modernist verse.

It was thanks to the efforts of the French Symbolists that our awareness of irony as a key to the distinctive tone of Modernism has been heightened. We are now able to distinguish Modernist streaks in much of the great poetry of the past – the ironic verse in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, the irony of character in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, the irony of Romantic involvement-in-detachment in Byron's longer

poems, itself a development of the Wordsworthian inchoate ironic relationship-in-isolation[45], the irony of the greatness of evil in *Paradise Lost*, and a host of other types. This extra-historical dimension is needed if Modernist poetry is to be seen as part of our tradition. We may follow Fraser or the editors of *The Modern Tradition* in claiming as 'modern' some writers of the past – Catullus (but not Virgil), Villon (but not Ronsard), Donne (but not Spenser), and Clough (but not Tennyson)[46]. Indeed, we may do this for our own time (accepting as 'modern' Conrad but not Galsworthy, for instance) and so re-establish the links which Modern Criticism is bent on maintaining between old and new; was this not what Eliot had wanted to do when in 1919 he published his 'revolutionary' 'Tradition and Individual Talent'?



To state that tone is the key to an understanding of Modernist poetry is not to solve the problem at all; to state that this 'tone' is ironic is to characterize a dominant streak which need not nullify all others. The real problem is to define, or re-define, irony. A compact definition will not do: such definitions have the habit of inviting exceptions, and the exceptions often multiply indefinitely. Besides, traditional definitions may be deceptive: an ironic tone generated by paradox is easy to recognize, but an ironic tone generated by the conflict of two tones *neither of them ironic* is not; an ironic tone based on an ironic situation, so common in drama, is immediately perceived and appreciated, but not an ironic tone which relies on what I

have called 'anti-image' or symbolic associations in creating an irony of situation; and what are we to say about the totally new kind which is, strictly speaking, more thematic than technical, having its roots in the Modernist outlook itself – in the self-deprecation, the cynicism, the sense of futility and desperation, the cynicism, the sense of futility and desperation that characterize the work of a major figure like Philip Larkin? It is better, I believe, to have the verse first and then, by a close reading, reach a tentative definition. Let us begin, therefore, by the type common in the poetry of the Tradition, namely that which relies on paradox. 'A Winter Ship' by Sylvia Plath is a good example:

> At this wharf there are no grand landings to speak of.
> Red and orange barges list and blister
> Shackled to the dock, outmoded, gaudy,
> And apparently indestructible.
> The sea pulses under a skin of oil.
> A gull holds his pose on a shanty ridgepole.
> Riding the tide of the wind, steady
> As wood and formal, in a jacket of ashes,
> The whole flat harbor anchored in
> The round of his yellow eye-button.
> A blimp swims up like a day-moon or tin
> Cigar over his rink of fishes.
> The prospect is dull as an old etching.

They are unloading three barrels of little crabs.
The pier pilings seem about to collapse

And with them that rickety edifice
Of warehuses, derricks, smokestacks and bridges
In the distance. All around us the water slips
And gossips in its loose vernacular,
Ferrying the smells of dead cod and tar.

Farther out, the waves will be mouthing icecakes –
A poor month for park-sleepers and lovers.
Even our shadows are blue with cold.
We wanted to see the sun come up
And are met, instead, by this iceribbed ship,

Bearded and blown, an albatross of frost,
Relic of tough weather, every winch and stay
Encased in a glassy pellicle.
The sun will diminish it soon enough:
Each wave-tip glitters like a knife [47].

The six stanzas are easily recognizable as an attempt at writing an 'object poem' (what the Germans call *Dinggedicht*), that is, a poem so concrete as to allow little personal interpretation, little interference by the 'meddling intelect' of the reader. It aims at the hardness of expression set up as an imagist ideal, at the condition of sculpture rather than music, at Rilk's Rodin-inspired work – and up

to line 23 it achieves just that. The picture of the wharf with many ships anchored, men working, fish, sea-bird, waves and the floating blimps, presents a typical London East End scene, and the poem, with the exception of the last seven lines, is hard enough to qualiify for an imagist poem. But it is not the hardness that stands out: it is the tone which is immediately indicated in the first line by the colloquial 'no grand landings to speak of'. The expression brings down to earth the feeling one always associates with a river bank, as the word 'grand' says and unsays something: you expect grandeur, you do not find it, but it is there. If it is only grandness not grandeur, that too cannot be found - none to speak of, that is !

Without wasting any time, the poet proceeds to humanize the ship in a line which bubbles with fricatives and sibilants, so that a sense of their 'earthiness' is immediately engendered – the blood in their veins, the 'blisters' from the 'shackles' and, finally, their mortality. Created by an image, the tone is maintained by another key word which is almost inevitable – 'apparently'.

The 'apparently inestructible' ships are the opposite of Wordsworth's famous 'woods decaying, never to be decayed', for these are mortal, the sea living (pulses). The tone is soon emphasized by the evocation of a Romantic frame of reference, and the scene is carefully set against it, namely Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*. As in most Modernist poems, the poet assumes that the reader

knows that frame of reference and so makes only two direct allusions to it – the Albatross, and the 'old etching' which recalls the 'painted ship on a painted ocean'. The resultant conflict in the imagery leads to paradox, the paradox to irony.

To begin with, the ship of death in Coleridge's poem becomes a ship of life here; or does it? The initial image presents it in human terms, as we have seen, though the impression is hardly one of life. It is closer to death-in-life which is the immediate counterpart of the Mariner's life-in-death (III, 11) and the images, form stanza 2 onward, complete the process. The Albatross of ice in line 26 was a living bird in stanza 2 (line 6) but, instead of being shot by the mariner, it simply petrifies. The bird first 'holds his pose' on the 'ridgehole', that is, it suspends itself in the air like Ted Hughes's Eagle, while Coleridge's bird 'perched' on the 'mast', but the mariner's 'bright eye' is transferred to the bird here. Unlike the 'glazed' eyes of the dying mariners, the living eye of the bird gives life to the scene by 'repesenting' it. In the same stanza it goes through another transformation through association with the ocean: it is 'round' (cf. Wordsworth's 'round ocean') and the whole harbour is 'anchored in' it. The bird soon becomes symbolic of the whole winter scene and when in the final seven-line coda we realize that what we see is not a living bird but one of 'frost' we capture the inherent paradox leading to the expected climax. The movement of the paradoxical imagery is linear, with each metaphor adding to

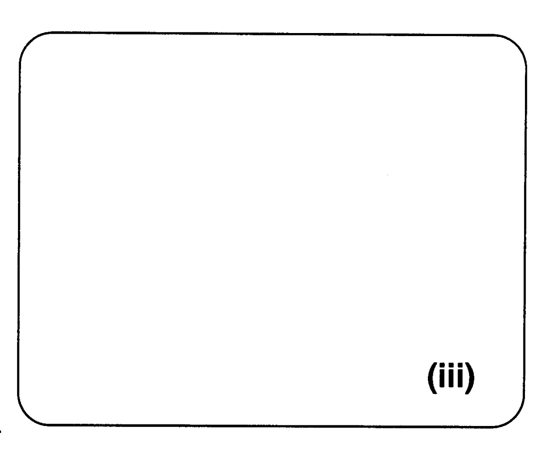
the tone until we recognize the irony of the whole thing: what was life-in-death in the hands of a romanticist, with all the spiritual implications of that paradox (religious, primarily, of course, but philosophical as well) now becomes death-in-life, mainly social, interpreted in terms of a natural - human scene, reminiscent of Eliot's crowd 'flowing over London bridge'. Not until the very last line, however, can we recognize the full force of the irony.

The reason is that Sylvia Plath works through the Modernist technique of contrapuntal details. As we have seen, a series of transferences creates the scene of unity of opposites, not in lengthy or wrought-up descriptions but in single words often suggestive enough to indicate the general trend. The initial ironic movement is presented in terms of stillness – the living bird is 'wooden' and the word 'ashen' at the end of the line strikes a muted death-note – while the movement below is deprived of life by being involuntary, futile and meaningless – the 'blimp swims up like a day-moon or tin/Cigar', a counterpart to the living fish in the water. And as the whole scene appears 'rickety' (opposite of the bird 'Steady/As wood', (the fish become 'dead'. The imaginative unity between the fishermen and the water (gossiping in loose vernacular), while for a moment a sign of life, is eventually broken up by the subsequent references to the ice, the 'shadows... blue with cold', and the 'iceribbed ship' which itself becomes 'an al-

batross of frost'. Everything becomes encased in a 'glassy pellicle'.

The final stroke is, however, the reference in the last two lines to a stillness not in the physical scene but in time. Nothing can be more anti-romantic than this: it is a reversal of the Shelleyan 'O, wind, /If winter comes, can Spring be far behind?', and a subversion of the 'normal' Romantic feeling that 'the seasons change' (Wordsworth), that winter must be ephemeral, that no frozen season can last for ever. The poet's hope is merely that the sun will 'diminish' the frozenness, but not bring about a spring: it will sharpen the murderous character of the waves, as 'Each wave-tip glitters like a knife'.

The 'Winter Ship' is an ironic image of a suspended voyage, of death-in-life, built up of a number of paradoxical images, working linearly, as has been mentioned, to a climax. The irony results not only from the paradoxes but also from the frustration of the reader's expectation of a resolution. It maintains its tone and ensures that the reader captures it through the subtle transferences in the imagery.



Turning to a Movement poet, we may trace another feaure of the Modernist interest in tone in the use of the first person pronoun. John Wain's work, the poems of 1978-79 no less than those of the mid-1950's may be seen as 'experiments' in irony. The tone may sometimes apper 'neutral' as Donald Davie has suggested in a poem of his own[48], sometimes characterized by 'a slyness... which (is) the unpleasant side of the ironic mode' [49] but always as a sustained attempt to break the 'high seriousness' of Romanticism. The first of his 'new' poems, that is, those published for the first time in his 1980 *Poems* is an excellent example, though too long for inclusion in this essay. A few remarks about it will do.

'Visiting an Old Poet' [50] is important for our purposes because of the alternation in it of two tones brought into subtle conflict to generate irony. The main tone with which the poem opens and ends is the 'conscious', almost self-conscious tone of most modern verse. The poet is here, talking to us directly, in deliberately 'unpoetic' idiom, carefully trying to maintain the sense of detachment characteristic of Modernism:

> As I walked from the village to his house
> along that curving half-mile road, I thought,
> *It's twenty-two years.* And I almost turned back.
>
> But when I came through the door, and saw him
> sitting on the sofa in the long cool rrom
> and he looked up, smiled, and knew me, I thought:
> *This will be good.* And at once came the next thought,
> not separate, two blossoms on the one spray.
> *It would be fitting to make a poem for him.*
>
> (His Italics)

The repeated first person in the first stanza mixes 'he' and 'him', and the next stanza starts with another 'I'. We are invited to witness an encounter with an old poet which should be a basis for a poem; in other words, we are invited to watch the making of a poem rather than read the 'finished' product. The process does not formally start un-

til the middle of the third stanza when a flight of fancy takes us back to the old poet's youth, before most people known to the poet today were born. 'They' becomes another significant pronoun: *they* are this world, and the poet, as he encounters old age, finds himself thrown back in time into a world 'fresh-emptied' of people; he considers a vacancy which is decidedly illusory:

Oh Lord of Life
where were you keeping them, the not-yet-born,
back in the days of his youthful sun and rain?
Were they full of hope, little half-formed bat-souls
beating their leather wings against the glass
to get into the lighted, scented world?
Or were they torpid at the end of the cave,
hanging in clusters, unwilling to come down,
feeling secure as long as their hooked claws
held on to the rough cold roof?

The image which 'they' invoke may be technically typical of, say, Ted Hughes, but, as an image, would it sit too uncomfortably in a poem by Shelley? It is totally unexpected, taking us into a prenatal world where the souls are not 'children sporting on the shore' (as in Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode') but little 'half-formed' bats moving in a wet dark cave – which Trilling should find more than Freudian[51]. The twist Wain gives to the old Platonic idea makes

it not simply macabre; for the deliberate choice of the bat, with its common suggestion of the vampire bat, creates a totally horrific image of men's souls. Wain must have had in mind also the 'evil animal' symbolism popularized by Jung as an archetype, espically assoiciated with the 'dark mansion' underground in the interpretation of dreams [52]. In other words, we suddenly see not the old poet but a world that lies beyond time, supposedly evoked by pushing back beyond the very man that we now face.

What is significant about this image is that it takes us deep into a world of darkness beyond life, thus combining prentatal with postmortal elements, and could thus belong to the 'dark chambers of the unconscious' - of the poet, of humanity? At once we are at a distance from the poet and deep within his mind, and at this point the original tone is restored with a change, a consequence of this image, that produces the first ironic touch in the poem:

> So I entered the house and I saw his body,
> sitting where it had sat two decades before,
> in the same stance, or only a little slackened:
> in the same clothes, or the same kind of clothes.
> It was his soul, of course, that I wanted to touch –

Once again we *are* outside this man; we watch a body which houses a soul that stands in sharp contrast to the bat-souls of men. The body is referred to rather irreverent-

ly as 'it'; but the irreverence is deliberate, as the tone acquires an acerbity characteristic of the 'clever' Wain: he takes us out of one cave image into another. Having more or less directly compared the old poet's body to a mountainous country, to a statue, to a shell and a highway, he goes back to the image of the cave as in it finding the best way of maintaining, and modifiying the original image of the soul. In a strikingly ironic tone he makes and breaks the new image, all the while making us conscious that *he* is conscious of this process:

> Notice that I do not ask what the soul is.
> (Ah there, Walt! You invented this idiom,
> this kind of talking and questioning in a poem:
> and you were an old poet, too, in time,
> and people visited you in Camden, New Jersey:
> ah there! Walt! I have always loved you too.)
> Notice, I say, that I do not ask what the soul is,
> everybody knows that, it is too obvious.

The sixty lines which conclude Section I (from 'It was his soul, of course, that I wanted to touch' to

> the pattern, the toss, the flutter, these go on, and these are the soul. Everyone knows that)

make us conscious that the visit to the old poet is in fact a visit to the speaker himself – a journey into the meaning of age, time, life, love, poetry, and, most impor-

tantly, the process of writing poetry identified here as soul 'The soul is not an entity but a process'. And it is ironic because it unmakes what it makes by the alternation of the two tones – the main tone, which I have described as 'conscious' or 'self-conscious', witty and 'clever', and the other which is serious, image-making, consciousness-probing. The alternation is balanced and guarantees a degree of detachment impossible in either classical or romantic verse; you cannot be emotionally involved when a self-questioning, self-sceptical poet invites you to consider his attempt at riding the 'winged horse' or to watch the 'Muse fly'. The contrast with Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' and the sublime invocation at the opening of the first and seventh books of *Paradise Lost* is remarkable :

So far, my *unambitious poem* has *crept*
close to the ground: the rhythms of talk, and easy
rhymes. But enough. Rise, *winged horse* ! Fly, *Muse!*
Soar nearerr to your subject, give strain for strain,
paean for paean. You celebrate a signer,
not of shanties or cool cabaret ditties, but
a *robed singer,* a lofty builder, a patient carver
of masks for the truth!
(My italics)

The first refernce is to Keats's 'I will fly to thee ... on the viewless *wings* of poesy', the second to Milton's 'Heavenly *Muse*... I .. invoke thy aid to my *adventurous song,* That

with no middle *flight* intends to *soar'* (my italics)- both too well known to require acknowledgement by the poet. However, when he parodied Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* he had to address the older poet directly, but now he is on familiar territory: could anyone miss the reference to the 'glad preamble' to Wordswortth's *Prelude* in 'robed singer' 'clothed in priestly robes.. my spirit'? The grandeur of each reference is ironically played on, insofar as the poet never really *flies*, never *soars* to the *Heavenly Muse,* never dresses himself in *priestly robes;* indded, when an occasion comes, it is the opposite we hear, the sceptical remark about *Heaven* which recalls Hamlet's 'undiscovered country':

> the human songs are over, earth's loss is heaven's
>
> gain,
>
> or the gain of whatever it is lies ahead
>
> across the gulf of death, when the old skin is shed
>
> and the one unknowable word is finally said.

And as these lines immediately precede the literary allusions, the expression 'close to the ground' aquires an added significance from the pun.

However, even this mood is soon broken when the next section opens with the pseudo-grand meditation on life and love 'I think of life. Divagations enough:') and ends, after a slow process of identification, with a tongue-in-the-cheek defence of the old poet's attitude to love. Another irony is generated here when the two tones once

again interact, the witty becoming embedded in the serious, the serious exploding at every turn with the use of archaic poetic diction (the 'feathered throat') the transference of a quality from one thing to another ('not caring' from man to bird) or the implicit reference to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* when the 'inconstant moon' of the Balcony Scene becomes the 'constant flame' of an inconstant lover:

> If I, entranced listener, love one nightingale
> as much as another, since the music is the same
> so he has loved women. Can I feel surprise
> that he, whose map of truth is the face of the moon,
> should have loved moon-nature and common-nature in whatever guise
> they choose to appear? His face was one constant flame,
> though fuelled by the changing female and the changing male.

Wain relies not so much on the power of pun as on the reader's ability to read the 'sub-text'. Though the constant flame, changing, is 'inconstant', the sub-text says that the old poet is both constant and inconstant at once, in much the same way as the speaker is. And their meeting point here is ironically their moment of separation: the tone changes once more into an acrid remembrance of the war, characterized by imaginative precision and the 'hard'

language of imagism, leading to an individual contemplation of time. In fact the change from one tone to the next is done so deftly that they often merge, not only at the edges but within the imagery itself and the recurrent questionings. The prose-like statements on time shock us into a sudden consciousnes of the seriousness of the subject. Without fully realizing it we become party to the process: whether or not we accept the abstractions and generalizations, we are compelled to read on until the image of the dog-mat resolves both abstract and concrete elements. The new image is adequately provocative to prepare us for the final three sections.

In section 7 the hexameters bring two of the original themes back into prominence: we again encounter the body of the old man only to consider his soul. The images are recapitulatory, formally deployed to appear sufficiently sharp and pointed for a final assault; but, again, such an assault never comes. The irony maintains the stuation unresolved, so that you end where you began, failing to see why the whole thing took place, only recognizing the conflict which, in the course of nine long sections, becomes the substance of the futile experience of living. The alternating tones are not interchangeable for they continually modify one another, often uniting to separate. Even at this last moment of recognition, neither of them predominates; indeed, our awareness of the main tone itself, the conscious, or self-conscious tone, owes much to the presence of the other which has been described as serious, image-making and consciousness-probing.

(iv)

Another kind of irony springs not from paradox, as in the poem by Plath, nor from the conflicting tones, as in Wain's poem, but from undercutting the seriousness of the subject by the inclusion of matter-of-fact 'little' details which become 'anti-images', that is, self-deflating images which negate the potential grandeur of the subject. Thom Gunn's *Passages of Joy* (1982) contains many poems written in this vein. The penultimate poem, 'Talbot Road', consists of five parts and is, I believe, adequately representative[53]. The first person pronoun also works hard here, but the emphasis is on the intensity of expression which in the best his verse produces irony. 'My poems', he wrote, 'were intensely felt and intensely derivative' [54],

and, we know, it was one of his teachers, Yvor Winters, who taught him 'that the intensity of a poem is intrinsic in the rhythm and tone of the speaking voice' [55]. This he uses with dexterity to produce his self-deflating images: we do not in Gunn look at a painting in the way we look at a poem by Pound (where semantic and metaphoric planes correspond to colours and contours)[56], but we hear a speaker – and one who varies his tone to unsay what he says. The intensity is therefore inherent in the way one is meant to read a poem; and though one is often helped by 'external' devices – such as syntactical tricks and systems of punctuation – the structure of the verse itself, inseparable from its themes, sets the tone.

Consider Part I :

> between the pastel boutiques
> of Notting Hill and the less defined
> windier reaches of the Harrow Road,
> all blackened brick, was the street
> built for burghers, another Belgravia,
> but eventually fallen
> to labourers ('No coloured or Irish
> Need Apply') and then like the veins
> of the true-born Englishman
> filling with a promiscuous mix:
> Pole, Italian, Irish, Jamaican,
> rich jostling flow. A Yugoslav restaurant

framed photographs of exiled princes,
but the children chattered with a London accent.
I lived on Talbot Road
for a year. The excellent room
where I slept, ate, read, and wrote,
had a high ceiling, on the borders
stucco roses were painted blue.
You could step through the window
to a heavy balcony and even
(unless the drain was blocked)
sup there on hot evenings.
That's what I call complete access –
to air, to street, to friendship:
for, from it, I could see, blocks away,
the window where Tony, my old friend,
toiled at translation. I too tried
to render obscure passages into clear English,
as I try now.

The central image is one of freedom: the typical London digs may be taken as central to the image, being self-sufficient and having 'complete access' to life. The details are, however, sarcastic enough in their unobtrusive acrid tone to deprive it of its meaning. The first detail is one of degradation, of 'falling' (notice the use of the participle 'fallen' with its suggestion of 'fallen mankind' and 'fallen an-

gels') – of condemning English society for its prejudice, class distinction and racism. It is ridiculed and defended at once, however, as we hear that the blood of a true-born Englishman is a mixture of many races.

So far, ideas have underecut one another without reference to the central image which is, however, prepared for by a variation on the theme of freedom in the image of 'exile'. As we contrast the 'exiled princes' who have become 'framed' vestiges of past glory with the freedom of the children chattering 'with a London accent' the first person pronoun emerges with a sudden commanding tone: 'I was there too', the poet seems to to say as though to suggest a kind of belonging now denied him but also that he was 'doing time' in gaol. The image of the room which is used on the surface as symbolic of inner freedom is reduced by the qualifications to a place of 'house arrest'. The details are directly ironic: rather than a home, we have a room (albeit 'excellent' – a neutral epithet characteristic of the educated jargon in Britain), and instead of a garden, so essential to the idea of an English home, we have inanimate shapes of roses, made of plaster and painted 'blue' – a cold colour assciated with death. The crucial ironic stroke comes in the apparently casual 'You could step through the window/ to a heavy balcony', as though to deny an implicit 'You are confined within, you know!'. It is the tone here which reveals this implication, for soon we have the ironic 'complete access' which denies all that follows. 'Friendship' is reduced to the ability to

see the window where an old friend toils at translation. The hesitant formulas 'You could step', 'that's what I call', and 'I could see' deepen the contrast with the initially suggested freedom until in the end a final ironic comment ' I too tried .. as I try now' links past and present and bridges the time gap (fifteen years) at one stroke.

I am not sure that Schmidt had seen this before he wrote his *Introduction to 50 Modern British Poets,* 1979, considering that the poem had first appeared, as Gunn tells us in the Acknowledgement, in 'the *London Magazine* and then as a limited edition published by the Helikon Press' before inclusion in *The Passages of Joy* (1982), for Schmidt writes:

> Among the most recent poems Gunn seems to be trying at the immediately real, at the moment in its intensity. Surrendering time perspective and prescriptive form, he is in danger of giving us raw moments which are not poems, which are merely notes, irrelevant because not intense in the way they are communicated [57].

I do not see that Gunn gives us 'raw moments' at all – not in his most recent volume of poems at any rate. The tone of 'Talbot Road' is alive with that type of irony which creates an intensity of contrasts if not an intensity of imagery. The 'living voice' of the verse is deceptively smooth, 'raw', suggestive of casual 'notes': but the inherent irony binds the 'moments' of experience together. In

the course of the poem, espcially as we move from Part one to Parts two and three, the tone gets farther and farther away from the 'immediately real' and approaches, without any strict chronological considerations, the immediately 'unreal'. Part two gives us a living image of the poet's friend Tony which consists almost entirely of adjectives, a few metaphors and one ironic incident in a pub. The verbs in this part are weak and, if they are there at all, may be omitted without great loss. 'Glamorous and difficult friend, helper and ally'; 'Two romances going on in London, one in Northampton, one in Ireland, probably others' (omit 'going on') 'Fantastical duke of dark corners,':

The fire of his good looks.

But almost concealed by the fringe of fire,

Behind the mighty giving of self,

at the center of the jollity, there was

something withheld, slow, something –

what? what? A damp smoulder of discontent.

Tony is, of course, a type; and, though the image tries to make him appear 'different', he is quite ordinary. The poet is conscious, I believe, that the irony will undercut the image sufficiently to depict a common English undergraduate in the 1960's. The 'easy' metaphors (fire of good looks etc.), the all too idiomatic expression (smoulder of discontent), the deliberate hyperbole (fantastic duke of dark corners) which harks back at Duke Orsino's 'high

fantastical' *(Twelfth Night)*, the colloqialism (two romances going on) – all balance the original 'mighty giving of self' to deny the image any seriousness. Tony's belittling of 'human relations' secures the irony: a swipe at E. M. Forster ensures the result, especially with the sarcastic use of academic jargon *(vide, passim, etc. –)* and the indirect reference to Forster's *Maurice* in the pub incident and the indirect suggestion of homosexuality in Part three where the poet relates an encounter with a 'youth of about nineteen

glaring at me

from a turn of desire. He held his look

as if shielding it from the wind.

Our eyes parleyed, then we touched

in the conversation of bodies.

Indeed, the suggestion comes to the surface, is spelt out, again with a sense of sudden shock, where, having recounted his 'adventures' (obviously with men) to his friend

He wondered aloud if he would be happier

if he were queer like me.

Now Part five tells us in clear tones another story – a story of a return to Talbot Road not as it was but as it is in reality, and in dream. The contrast between the two images (past and present realities on the one hand, and mem-

ory and dream on the other) generates an emotional intensity unique in its effectiveness. The opening lines bring the expected change:

That was fifteen years ago.

Tony is dead, the block where I lived

Has been torn down. The mind

is an impermanent place, isn't it,

but it looks to permanence.

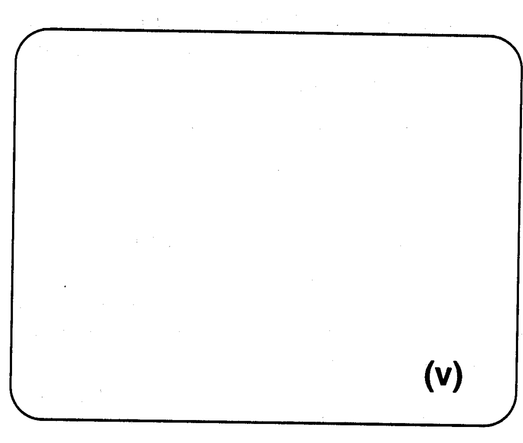
The potential wistfulness is suppressed by the grammar: auxiliaries are used to 'state', almost to *report* a condition with a stunning finality. The active verbs are 'lived', which is part of the unavoidable qualifying clause, and 'looks' which qualifies the implied unity of past and mind. The brisk rhythm has a decisiveness which holds the reader's breath, while the effect is immediately undone by the image of the dream. The dream is ironically related to reality by the final

Sentimental postcard of a dream

of a moment between race-riots!

Soon enough, however, a surviving image from the past seals the irony: a little boy stares blankly at the street, finding no meaning whatsoever in all that happens below. Suddenly the past, the street – 'the human traffic', 'that fine public flow' – the stillness and the movement,

the reality and the dream, the dead and the living pale into insignificance; and the questions 'who were they? where were they going?' are almost rhetorical.



Sometime after writing this poem, Thom Gunn made one of those common attempts at defining the modern poetic. Reviewing Robert Creeley's *Collected poems 1945-1975*, he observed that 'its language has never fitted in with the official current notions of the poetic': and, as an example, he remarks that 'verbs do not work harder than, say, the adjectives'[58]. I do not see that in his practice Thom Gunn conforms to what he calls the 'official' current notion of the poetic: not only does he make the adjectives sometimes work harder than verbs, but he often relies almost entirely on adjectives in establishing his tone – an essential feature of Symbolism. As early as Mallarmé, the use of the 'significant' adjective determined the tone; in

the hands of Laforgue, adjectives (and adverbs) work too hard sometimes. Let us illustrate this often-quoted stanza:

Les Jeunes Filles inviolables et frêles

Descendent vers la petite chapelle

Dont les chimérique cloches

Du joli, joli dimanche

Hygiéniquement et élégamment les appellent[59].*

As C. Scott has remarked, the use of polysyllabic adjectives and adverbs underlines the disproportion between their weight and the flippant intention behind them, thus effectively transforming pomp into pomposity[60]. In other words, the irony is generated by the discrepancy between what the adjectives in themselves are and what they do in this context. In the hands of the Symbolist an adjective may be blown out of all porportion to draw attention to itself, and so create a gap in the context which is essential to irony. The adverbs *hygiéniquement* and *élégamment* are too full of themselves and suggest an empty 'ritual of language' which 'apes the empty ritual of Sunday'[61]. To say this, however, is to presuppose an audience willing to perceive an emptiness in the Sunday ritual; and this was one of the reasons why Pound distrusted

* (The inviolable and delicate Young Girls go down towards the small chapel whose unreal bells, the bells of prim, prim Sunday, summon them hygienically and elegantly)59

Symbolism. Pound's system was to leave nothing contingent upon belief and make the text as complete in itself as it possibly can, owing to a conscious analogy with painting which was becoming a model of self-sufficiency. But Symbolism was not all 'soft' as Pound charged, nor was Imagism all 'hard'; and adjectives are used on occasion not to indicate personal involvement but to negate it, so that the audience's acceptance or rejection will be irrelevant.

Thom Gunn's method is related to Symbolism in this respect alone, for otherwise he follows the Imagist aesthetic more or less closely. However, when he succeeds it is not because of any particular aesthetic he has chosen but because of his tone which, as has been shown, is essentially ironic. Indeed, if carried to an extreme, the imagist poem may degenerate into verse that is too 'hard' to possess any 'significant' tone at all: it may become a factual record of one or more moments, rendering concrete details with the objectivity of a newspaper report. Failures of this kind abound in the early collections of the Imagists; and some may still be encountered in Thom Gunn himself. A notable example is 'In the Snack-Bar' by Edwin Morgan[62]; in other poems, however, Morgan manages to enliven the verse with an unobtrusive irony by using a strictly limited number of adjectives and adverbs. The 'for Bonfires' sequence is a good example:

I

The leaves are gathered, the trees are dying

for a time.

A seagull cries through white smoke in the garden fires
that fills the heavy air.
All day heavy air
is burning, a moody dog
sniffs and circles the swish of the rake.
In streaks of ash, the gardener drifting
ghostly, beats his hands, a cloud
of breath to the red sun.

II

An island in the city, happy demolition men
behind windowed hoardings – look at them
trailing drills through rubble dust, kicking rubble,
smoking learning on a pick, putting the stub
over an ear and the hot yellow helmet over that,
whistling up the collapsing chimney, kicking the
ricochet, rattling the trail with
snakes of wire, slamming slabs
down, plaster, cornice, brick, brick
on broken brick and plaster dust,
sprawling with steaming cans and pieces
at noon, afternoon bare sweat shining

paths down chalky backs, coughing
in filtered sunshine, slithering, swearing,
joking, slowly stacking and building
their rubbish into a total bonfire.
Look at that Irishman, bending
in a beautiful arc to throw
the last black rafter to the top,
stands back, walks around it singing
as it crackles into flames – old doors,
old beams, boxed, window-frames,
a rag doll, sacks, flex, old newspapers,
burst shelves, a shoe, old dusters, rags of
wallpaper roses. And they all stand round
and cheer the tenement to smoke.

III

In a galvanized bucket
the letters burn. They roar and twist
and the leaves curl back one by one.
They put out claws and scrape the iron
like a living thing,
but the scrabbling to be free soon subsides.

The black pages fuse

to a single whispering mass

threaded by dying tracks of gold.

Let them grow cold,

and when they are dead

quickly draw breath[63].

Ezra Pound's attack would apply. 'The Symbolists', he said, 'dealt in association, that is a kind of allusion, almost of allegory'[64]. Though not a Symbolist, the poet relies in creating his tone on 'association and allegory' which counterbalance the 'hard' details built up cumulatively from Part I to part III. The choice of details, as in the modern art of photography, determines the 'associations'; and the thematic variation of these 'associations' produces a tone which is essentially ironic.

Now while the 'subject' is archetypal – a fire, with certain undertones of purgation – the details suggest a ritual of burning with overtones of joy and celebration. Part I establishes the subject: winter is approaching and it is time for bonfires in the gardens to burn up the debris of the 'dying year'. The association of the opening words is unmistakable – it is a parody on Shelley's 'rose leaves... are heaped'[65] – and the twist in the image is re-inforced by the matter-of-fact, anti-romantic 'for a time'. Soon, however, the adjectives come to work in conjunction with the main verbs to produce the unique effect of the 'fire': the

'white smoke' fills the 'heavy air', and the 'heavy air' is burning. The 'ghostly' grandeur becomes a latter-day angel in charge of an earthly hell, though the last two lines suggest a pagan fire, a pagan ritual and a pagan sun.

Part I can stand alone, but it would be more 'romantic' than Modernist in its celebration of burning and the careful process of 'ascension' from earth to heaven, from the burning leaves to the burning sun. Note, particularly, the use of the key words 'cries' for the gull and 'circles' for the dog which, though common enough, acquire added significance from association with the 'pagan' burning scene. The tone is therefore slightly modified through these associations in preparation for the final direction it takes in part II from the use of the three important words 'happy' 'singing' and 'cheer'.

What we have now is, in effect, a changed scene, a different bonfire. Rather than archetypal purgation we have 'civilized' demolition. It is a scene of action – men pulling down a building with zest and relish, 'kicking', 'smoking', 'whistling'. The hoarded details of the real scene behind the 'hoardings' culminate in a human reaction when the reader, who has been invited to look at them, sees them sweating in the afternoon

coughing

in filtered sunshine, slithering, swearing,

joking, slowly stacking and building

their rubbish into a total bonfire.

The key word is, of course , 'building'. The intense action of demolition men has to culminate in building, though their act of building is decidedly an act of 'total' destruction. Instead of a 'moody dog' or a 'ghostly' grandeur we now have a big child, an Irishman, dancing like the 'flame dancers' of Central Africa, but not around a fire-god – around burning *rubbish*. Too obvious, perhaps, the irony is tempered by the spate of little details, and the tone is once again balanced by the final :

And they all stand round

and cheer the tenement to smoke.

Part III is a real *tour de force*, as the leaves of the opening line become 'letters' – records of human communication and a testimony of man's thought. They come alive again, however, both as actual and as metaphoric animate beings, if not like Wordsworth's objects which are 'with voluntary power instinct'[66] then simply like 'living things' 'roaring' and 'scrabbling to be free'. The allusion to Shelley's:

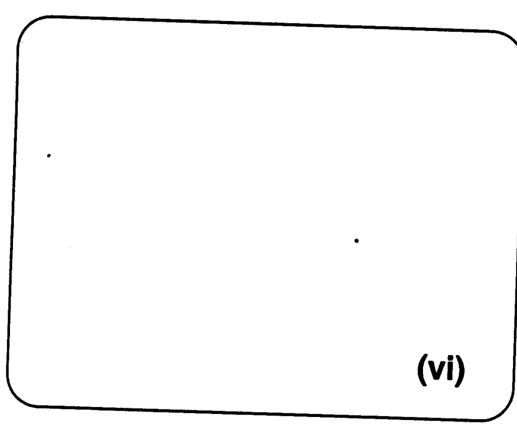
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth

Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind[67].

As the burning continues, and the flames subside, the ironic three lines present a modern 'hearth' where relief comes not from the purgation, as in Part I, nor from the demolition, as in Part II, but from the cold of death. One

'breathes again' not at the prospect of freedom, as in Wordsworth[68], but at the death of words – the 'total' destruction of flimsy perishable registers of human thought, sarcastically thrown into a bucket.

It may be safe to state that without these symbolic associations the poem's tone would be seriously altered: it may not lose its irony altogether, but the 'hard' details could drown it out of all recognition.



Another variety of irony, apart from those based on paradox, conflicting tones, anti-images and symbolic associations, has its roots deep in the Modernist outlook itself – in the sense of defeat, despair and utter futility which distinguishes the attitude of a twice-disillusioned war generation. Philip Larkin is, I believe, the best representative of this outlook. It is on this account that Geoffrey Thurley declares him 'the modern poet'[69], Charles Tomlinson criticizes his 'tenderly nursed sense of defeat'[70], and Eric Homberger calls him the 'saddest heart in the post-war supermarket'[71].

Larkin's critics have invariably attacked his tone, which *seems* to be 'uniformly depressed' but is hardly so, in fact,

as Andrew Motion has shown[72]. The tone may appear to be depressed but is never uniform, thanks to irony.

It is a central paradox of the Modernist school that the absence of reliable absolutes (and the most time-honoured absolute of all is religion) [73] does not preclude the possibility of their existence at another level. The cynicism which entails a denial of faith in the absolutes inherited from the nineteenth century still allows for faith in other absolutes drawn from the deepest recesses of man's consciousness. However, this paradox is further complicated by the fact that new sets of absolutes will be challenged by man's 'Modernist' sceptical mind. Any faith, or denial of faith, cannot therefore be expressed in absolute terms; for beneath any assertion, or negative assertion, the reverse will be read. And this paradox, which is fnherent in a Modernist 'habit of mind', characterized the position of both poet and reader: if the reader is 'Modernist' enough, he will always be prepared to see the absolute qualified, no matter how in earnest the poet may 'sound'. If the poet allows the paradox to come to the surface, mainly through irony, then an immediate response will be ensured. If, for instance, the poet seems to celebrate the 'victory of life' in terms ambiguous enough to allow for 'defeat' to be read into his work, the reader will directly respond – not to the hidden meaning alone, however relevant to his personal experience it may be, but to the 'tonal structure' which makes the ambivalence possible. In Larkin the tonal structure is determined primarily by irony. So, a poem like

'Next Please' (*The Less Deceived*, p. 20) may appear hopelessly bleak and death-obsessed, particularly as the grimness of the first five stanzas leads to a recognition in the last that death is the Ultimate, The new Absolute; but that does not prevent the poem from celebrating the human power, too deep-seated to be shaken by such a recognition, to build hopes on the future, to expect a change, to accept time. The typical Larkin irony concerns 'resignation': he appears to accept (or to be 'resigned to') what he shows (and knows) to be unacceptable – the isolation of the human sprit, the lack or inadequacy of the old resources of spiritual power, and the futility of all human endeavour.

Take isolation. Defenders of Larkin sometimes point out 'affirmative'[74] aspects in his verse by arguing that he has succeeded in substituting a 'humanistic' approach to man's predicament for the old obscurantist bent in human thinking, say by substituting love for the lost reliably comforting absolutes. 'In the place of religion', it has been suggested, 'and romantic theories of childhood's or nature's beneficence, (Larkin) cherishes the sanctity of personal relationships' [75]. But consider a mature poem like *Vers de Sociéte*. The ironic persona created could be anybody – a man living alone, representing a modern consciousness battling to survive in an unfriendly world where the wind could still be heard, the moon seen and books read 'under a lamp', but where real communication has become truly difficult. Contrary to Eliot's position, the speaker here has

no hope in the saving powers of man: he could not 'give, control or surrender'; he is too self-possessed to respond to people, wanting them to be 'nice' to him but unwilling to be 'nice' to them. On the other hand, he knows that solitude is an ideal, albeit a 'romantic' one, but also recognizes the walls of egoism that 'old' solitude erects – and the example of Wordsworth is never far off. The 'self-sufficing' power of solitude, as the romantic poet calls it, no longer exists in a world of strangers masquerading as friends: you have to communicate with them even if it means a deeper recognition of your loneliness.

The poem is therefore not a simple attack on social relationships, nor is it simply the reverse. It is an ironic recognition of the predicament of modern man who has to accept isolation as a condition of human consciousness, regardless of whether he is alone or in company. The twist given here to the famous Arnoldian idea that genius is always lonely[76] characterizes the Modernist outlook. You do not have to be a genius to realize the depth of your loneliness: any one who is truly alive, in the sense of having a rich conscious life, must join the geniuses of the past. Is it because of the loss of faith in an Absolute – in God, for instance, as the poem says (stanza 4) – or the loss of the old concept of society? We have no answers, nor can we have any.

In poem after poem of the mature Larkin a self-critical, self-sceptical persona explodes the possibility of both re-

lationship and solitude. Love remains a possibility, no doubt, but the more successful poems question its meaning. It is not exactly 'the failure of love' that he laments, as Bedient says[77], or 'love's unsuccess' as Schmidt puts it[78], but the irony of love. For the first time in the history of English literature love is at once aspired to as an inevitability but ridiculed as inadequate, or, at best, never fully attainable. We have been brought up to consider love as a permanent possibility, and to be disappointed if it recedes as a life force or is distorted by the cynics. The distortion here seems to engender a kind of positive disappointment through which the poet aims at revealing a 'Modernist reality', namely that life subsumes a 'great negative order of ideas'[79] and that the only means of being positive is to be conscious continually of this 'negative order'. Side by side with the life-making power of love there is the negative power of death which looms large in Larkin's poetry as a gaping vacancy – 'the saving emptiness' of 'Ambulances'. I have said 'side by side', but it may be more true to say 'within'; for it is within the living force of love that death is portrayed; and Larkin prefers to perceive love *through* death. 'Love Songs in Age' presents a woman defeated by death: she finds old copies of love songs she would play when she was young and is distressed in her widowhood by her knowledge of their 'emptiness', as Timms correctly identifies the lady's emotion[80]. Nowhere in fact is this 'emptiness' better expressed than in 'An Arundel Tomb' where the irony of petrified love is handled with

great subtlety to produce one of the finest poems in the Modernist vein. It is, I believe, worth quoting in full:

Side by side, their faces blurred,
The earl and countess lie in stone,
Their proper habits vaguely shown
As jointed armour, stiffened pleat,
And that faint hint of the absurd -
The little dogs under their feet.

Such plainness of the pre-baroque
Hardly involves the eye, until
It meets his left-hand gauntlet, still
Clasped empty in the other; and
One sees, with a sharp tender shock,
His hand withdrawn, holding her hand.

They would not think to lie so long.
Such faithfulness in effigy
Was just a detail friends would see:
A sculptor's sweet commissoned grace
Thrown off in helping to prolong

The Latin names around the base.

They would not guess how early in
Their supine stationary voyage
The air would change to soundless damage,
Turn the old tenantry away;
How soon succeeding eyes begin
To Look, not read. Rigidly they

Persisted, linked, through the lengths and breadths
Of time. Snow fell, undated. Light
Each summer thronged the glass. A bright
Litter of birdcalls strewed the same
Bone-riddled ground. And up the paths
The endless altered people came,

Washing at their identity.
Now, helpless in the hollow of
An unarmorial age, a trough
Of smoke in slow suspended skeins
Above their scrap of history,

Only an attitude remains:

Time has transfigured them into
Untruth. The stony fidelity
They hardly meant has come to be
Their final blazon, and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love.

The Whitsun Weddings, pp. 45-6

In common with other Modernists Larkin uses paradox, symbolic associations and word-play to produce his ironic tone. He differs, however, in having his central emotion 'qualified' by certain objective details which are essential to his tone. So, apart from the dominant paradox of the loving stone, and the many associations with the literature of the past, such as the 'stationary voyage' (stanza 4) which mocks Wordsworth's lines on Newton's statue:

The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone.

The Prelude, iii, 62-3

and harks back to Shakespeare's opening lines of sonnet (lv)

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments

Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,

and apart from the subdued pun (paronomasia) of 'lie in stone', 'to lie so long' – especially in view of the reference in the last stanza to 'untruth' and 'almost true' – there are certain details which create an image of a vacancy, the real theme of the poem. Larkin may have thought of Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' to which 'An Arundel Tomb' might be an 'ironic rejoinder'[81]. 'Though Marvell says, 'The grave's a fine and private place, Though none, I think, do there embrace', Larkin's Earl and Countess *do* embrace in the tomb, or so the sculpture would have us believe'[82]. Larkin *might* have thought of *carpe diem*, and his poem *may* be an ironic rejoinder to Marvell's, but he most probably did not. It is not life or love that he celebrates here but the absence of both, which I have called a 'vacancy'.

The tomb is not 'peopled', properly speaking; and the effigies *which* 'lie in stone' betray the hard and harsh fact that the Earl and Countess are *not* there. The poet realizes that 'their faithfulness is a deception – and also admits that for them to be shown holding hands at all is nothing more than a 'sculptor's sweet commissioned grace'[83]. The assertions are negative, and it is the task of the little details to reveal that the statues repesent not the survival, not the *presence,* of love, but the absence of it. The details which are carefully chosen refer to a void, and culmi-

nate in the most effective image of vacancy in the whole of Larkin, superior even to 'Absences' in the previous collection *The Less Deceived;* these are the lines I have in mind:

Now, helpless in the hollow of

An unarmorial age, a trough

Of smoke in slow suspended skeins

Above their scrap of history,

Only an attitude remains:

Time has transformed them into Untruth.

The grammar is uncertain: the fluid syntax allows the key adjectival phrase to qualify the smoke, the attitude, as well as the effigies of the lovers (in view of the last words in the preceding line 'their identity'). Strangely, the 'trough of smoke' may itself be in apposition to the adjectival phrase, so that the attitude is at once 'helpless' and 'a trough of smoke'; and the colon at the end of the stanza encourages this reading. So, if the 'attitude' is helpless in the 'hollow' of our age, then it exists in a vacancy; it has been deprived of all the grandeur of the 'armorial age' and now is itself a 'scrap of history' reminiscent of the 'alms for oblivion' which Time puts in the 'wallet at his back' in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (III, iii, 145-6). Time here simply denies the 'truth' of the lovers. Timms makes a great effort to defend the use of 'untruth', distinguishing it from 'lie' and 'falsehood'[84]), but the word is unequivocal,

and it paves the way for the final most effective 'almost true'. The tomb may represent an 'attitude', but it is a negative attitude, a 'lie', and it is '*a kind of* truth' not because love has survived but because it has not[85]. What we see in the tomb is the 'hollow' of time, because only time can triumph, and what proves that 'what will survive of us is love' is not human in character: it is the 'stony fidelity' of the statues which 'time has transfigured' into 'untruth'. It is as though man is destined to be thrown into the gaping vacancy of time before any of his real emotions is fulfilled.

The denial by affirmation, or, at least, the negative qualification of the positive, is central to Larkin's irony of vacancy. That the vacancy appears as death is not new: many poets have dealt with death in terms of a gaping hollow. What is really new in Larkin is that life itself could be a vacancy – a series of expectations, disappointments and regrets. It is never, however, the death-in-life portrayed in Eliot's *Waste Land:* we have no mythology here, no symbolic death, but actual inanity given the flesh and blood of everyday existence. The inanity is not, in other words, the absence of anything that could give life a meaning (such as faith, love etc.) but the fact that one lives to die. And it is in this sense that Larkin differs drastically from the romantic mode that celebrated life as life, whether directly as in the early nineteenth century or indirectly as in the early twentieth. Time in this poem is a force of doom; and, as in other poems, it only serves to bring man nearer to death, casting a terrible shadow over

his life. The image in the early epigrammatic (almost Yeatsian) quatrain in *The North Ship*

This is the first thing

I have understood:

Time is an echo of an axe

Within a wood

is restated in one of his most recently published poems 'Aubade':

I work all day, and get half drunk at night.

Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.

In time the curtain-edges will grow light.

Till then I see what's really always there:

Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,

Making all thought impossible but how

And where and when I shall myself die[86].

Time as echo is a new image; but the Yeatsian suggestion that it is inseparable from the actual deed, the felling of the tree, is unavoidable. In 'Aubade' the echo is stilled into a 'soundless' dark with a promise of light presaging death. The complexity is again novel, albeit typical of all his mature work. The tone is only slightly altered by the careful manipulation of the key words 'I stare', 'in time', 'curtain edges' and 'light'. The sequence is significant and the paradox of death seen through the light of

day is deliberate: the 'aubade', that is, the dawn song, is only an evening song.

In his last volume of poems *(High Windows)* Larkin suggests that the advance of death marks the 'end of choice' (cf. 'The Building') and that

> these are the first signs:
>
> Not knowing how, not hearing who, the power
>
> Of choosing gone
>
> 'The Old Fools'

but this is only a detail; 'choice', or the lack of it, could hardly be regarded as central to Larkin's irony of resignation. Indeed, how could you relate choice to such an explicit death-wish as is expressed in 'Wants' *(The Less Deceived)* ? The theme is almost irrelevant even in the poems which do refer to choice, such as 'The Building' and 'The Old Fools', as well as the celebrated 'Going' and 'Nothing to be Said'.

There can be no better illustration of the ruthlessness with which the poet approaches our ideas of life than 'Myxomatosis', a poem where the speaker puts a rabbit out of its miseries with a sharp stroke (perhaps on the head). The killing (a from of euthanasia, the ethical character of which still being debated in Britain) is portrayed as an act of kindness; and the key sentence applies to one of the speaker's – and, presumably, one of our – common assumptions about life:

You may have thought things would come right again

If you could only keep quite still and wait.

The Less Deceived, p. 31

In other words, there is no cure for suffering; and death, otherwise a 'comfortless blank'[87], is the only source of comfort. The situation is ironic: whatever the form it takes, suffering generates the common notions we live with – fortitude, perseverance etc. – which are essential for survival, but life itself is incurable, and death the only relief. The poem may touch upon 'our inability to reach across the suffering of another creature to offer real comfort' [88], but the real theme, suggested by the symbolic act of killing, is that only when we have relinquished our deceptive ideas of 'bearing up' and 'accepting' suffering can death be accepted.

The same ironic situation occurs again and again in the mature Larkin. 'Dockery and Son' is a good example of the ironic acceptance of death: life has no meaning whether you succeed in adapting to the established norms of marriage and procreation or opt out. The difference is at once confirmed and denied, 'how much... How little', and ultimately, the night train journey becomes a symbol of man's progress towards 'the only end of age.'[89]. I have called it ironic because the poet, through his favourite middle-aged persona, gives us the 'normal' attitude of rejection while deep down he yearns to conform, to be like everybody else as though conformity

could give meaning to existence. 'As though', I say, because the ironic tone of the last stanza makes us realize that conformity in itself is meaningless; and the last, often-quoted four lines clinch the point:

> Life is first boredom, then fear.
>
> Whether or not we use it, it goes,
>
> And leaves what something hidden from us chose,
>
> And age, and then the only end of age.

In contrast, Larkin can achieve great 'effects of poetry', to use Garrod's famous phrase[90], without giving us 'sober daunting reflections'[91]. The tone of 'At Grass', unaided by any direct comments, succeeds in getting across what I believe must be the quintessence of Modernist irony. The language, the details, the rhythms all point in the direction of a neutral tone: and the neutrality *is* ironic. In other words, the attempt to present an 'unsorted experience'[92] is deliberately designed to lull the reader into accepting the experience as 'quietistic'[93]. The trap is so successful that more often than not the reader is tempted to regard the poem as a celebration of the freedom of old age. The subtlety with which the resignation of the horses is portrayed illustrates the conflict every poet has known between feeling and belief; and the key expression 'must be' in the last stanza is essential for grasping the ironic tone. Larkin was not unconscious of this conflict and, as early as 1962, he stated his position:

> Very little that catches the imagination can get clearance
> from either the intelligence or the moral sense.
> And equally, properly truthful or dispassionate
> themes enlist only the wannest suport from
> the imagination. The poet is perpetually in
> that common human condition of trying to
> feel a thing because he belives, it, or believe
> a thing becauase he feels it[94].

The poet wants to feel that the horses are happy and that they 'gallop for .. joy', but can he really believe this even if he feels it deeply? The groom and the groom's boy 'come' in the evening with 'bridles', and they take them to the darkness of the stables – an obscurity which is literally a reflection of the end of their journey, with death lurking in an end-of-life corner. Hence the qualifying 'must be' – 'Or gallop for what must be joy'. It has to be joy, the poet wants to believe it because he feels it, or, perhaps, wants to feel it because he believes it? We know that the horses are truly old, not merely past their prime; and we know from the setting that the darkness of the landscape is symbolic of the end of life; yet we share in their freedom and would like to feel (or believe) that they are happy.

To miss the ironic tone is to miss what the poem is *about* - as Alvarez does. In his now famous *Beyond the*

Gentility Prinicple [95], Alvarez praises the poem as 'elegant and unpretentious and rather beautiful in its gentle way', but proceeds to state that it is 'a nostalgic recreation of the Platonic (or *New Yorker*) idea of the English scene, part pastoral, part sporting'[96]. Comparing it with Ted Hughes's 'A Dream of Horses', which he commends as being *about* [97] something, Alvarez condemns Larkin's horses as '*social* creatures of fashionable race meetings and high style; they belong to the world of R.S.P.C.A. '[98]. Here is the text of the poem:

The eye can hardly pick them out

From the cold shade they shelter in,

Till wind distresses tail and mane;

Then one crops grass, and moves about

The other seeming to look on –

And stands anonymous again.

Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps

Two dozen distances sufficed

To fable them: faint afternoons

Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps,

To inlay faded, classic Junes –

Silks at the start: against the sky
Numbers and parasols : outside,
Squadrons of empty cars, and heat,
And littered grass: then the long cry
Hanging unhushed till it subside
To stop-press columns on the street.

Do memories plague their ears like flies?
They shake their heads. Dusk brims the shadows.
Summer by summer all stole sway,
The starting-gates, the crowds and cries –
All but the unmolesting meadows.
Almanacked, their names live; they

have slipped their names, and stand at ease,
Or gallop for what must be joy,
And not a fieldglass sees them home,
Or curious stop-watch prophesies:
Only the groom, and the groom's boy,
With bridles in the evening come[99].

With poetry like that one cannot assume a condscending attitude or pretend to be charitable: it is Modernist be-

cause it is ironic, and the irony forces itself through the deceptively pastoral (romantic?) scene. The poem is *not* 'a simple lament about old age'[100] but a complex rendering of what I have called the 'vacancy' which inevitably follows upon 'achievement' – the cold that follows upon the warmth of life. Does it not recall to mind the 'after-vacancy' of Wordsworth which inevitably follows 'action'?

Action is transitory – a step, a blow,

The motion of a muscle – this way or that –

'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy

We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:

Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,

And shares the nature of infinity.

The Borderers, III, 1539-44

And the 'after-vacancy' must represent a 'superior' kind of suffering, for it brings out the sense in which all creatures are defeated by time. The 'resignation' of the horses is therefore forced, for there is nothing they could do except wait for the end to 'come'. It is an irony which has roots, as I have said, in the Modernist outlook itself and nowhere better illustrated than in the mature Larkin.

NOTES

1. Most critics and scholars trace Modernism as far back as the 1890's; Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane (eds.) *Modernism 1890-1930*, Penguin 1976 (reprinted 1981).
2. Robert Rehder, *Wordsworth and the Beginning of Modern Poetry*, London, 1981.
3. Cf. '*A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover' and other Essays*, Penguin, 1961 (Rep. 1967), p. 89.
4. Cf. Kathleen Coburn's *Inquiring Spirit: A New Presentation of Coleridge from his Published and Unpublished Prose Writings* (ed.) London 1951.
5. Bradbury, *Op. Cit.*, p.49.
6. Cf. Clive Scott, 'Symbolism, Decadence and Impressionism' in Bradbury, *Op. Cit., pp.* 206-228.
7. Bradbury, *Op. Cit.*, p.47.

8. 'Tradition and Individual Talent', *The Sacred Wood,* London, 1920 (reprinted 1969).

9. G. Hartman, *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970*, New Haven, 1970; H. Bloom (ed.) *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, N. Y. 1970; Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience*, N. Y., 1963; Morse Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, N. Y., 1963. *Passim.*

10. Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image*, London, 1957; A. Alvarez, *Beyond All This Fiddle: Essays 1955-1967*, London, 1968.

11. G. Lucàcs, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, tr. by John & Necke Mander, London, 1962.

12. Bradbury, *Op. Cit.*, p. 45; & cf. Peter Jones (ed.) *Imagist Poetry*, London, 1972 (rep. 1985).

13. Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, (Hestle, 1960) p. 80.

14. *Heritage of Symbolism*, London, 1943.

15. Cyril Connolly, *The Modern Movement: One Hunderd Key Books from England, France and America 1880-1950*, London, 1965, p. 4.

16. Cf. G. Hough's *Image and Experience: Studies in a Literary Revolution*, London, 1960, where he argues that English literature never really had a Symbolist movement proper, that Modernist poetry in England owed hardly anything to the French Symbolists.

17. *Art Now*, London, 1933, revised edition 1966, p. 20.

18. *They Asked for a Paper*, London, 1962, pp. 9-25.

19. In The 'Introduction' to *Victorian and Modern Poetry*, ed. by M. Enani and M. Farid, Cairo, 1982.

20. Jose Orterga Y Gasset, 'The Dehumanization of Art', in *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings on Art and Culture*, Garden City, N. Y., 1956, p. 13.

21. Bradbury, *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

22. F. Kermode, 'Modernisms', *in Modern Essays*, London, 1971.

23. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero (Le Degré Zero de L'ecriture)*, London, 1967, p. 9.

24. Bradbury, *Op. Cit.*, p. 27.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Wylie Sypher, *From Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature*, N. Y., 1960, p. xix.

27. Bradbury, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

28. Ihab Hassan, 'POST Modern ISM' in *New Literary History*, vol. III, No. 1, Autumn 1971, pp. 5-30, reprinted in I. Hassan, *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times*, Urbana and London, 1975. Cf. also I. Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*, N. Y., 1967, and his *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Towrad a Post-Modern Literature*, N. Y. 1971.

29. Bradbury, *Op. Cit.*, p. 24. Many twentieth-century writers have not contributed to this tendency and, if actual practice is anything to go by, much verse shows that the poets were

anti-Modernist. In his book *The Struggle of the Modern*, 1963, Stephen Spender distinguishes two streams – the moderns and the contemporaries.

30. Bradbury, *Op. Cit.* p. 25.

31. Cf. J. P. Pecorino, 'Resurgent Icons: Pound's First Canto and the Visual Arts', *Journal of Modern Literature*, (Temple University) Vol. IX, No. 2, May 1982, pp. 159-173.

32. Cf. Natan Zach, 'Imagism and Vorticism in Bradbury', *Op. Cit.*, pp. 238-9.

33. Bradbury, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

35. Irving Howe, 'Introduction to the Idea of the Modern', in I. Howe (ed.) *Literary Modernism*, (Greenwich, Connecticut, 1967), p.13.

36. F. L. Lucas, *Style*, London, 1955 (reprinted 1964)

37. E. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, tr. W. Trask, Princeton, 1953.

38. C. Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, London, 1948.

39. From Bradbury, *Op. Cit.* p. 33.

40. Clive Scott, 'Symbolism, Decadence and Impressionism', in Bradbury, *Op. Cit.*, P. 212.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Le Figaro literaire*, 18 September 1886; Cited By C. Scott in Bradbury, *Op. Cit.*, P. 208.

43. Printed in Bradbury, *Op. Cit.* pp. 323-336.

44. Ibid. p. 329.

45. Cf. John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime*, London, 1954.

46. G.S. Fraser, *The Modern Writer and His World*, London, 1953; Richard Ellman and Charles Fiedelson (eds,), *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*, New York and London, 1965.

47. Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems*, (ed. Ted Hughes) London, 1981, pp. 112-3.

48. 'Remembering the Thirties', *Brides of Reason*, p. 26

49. David Timms, *Philip Larkin*, Edinburgh, 1973, p. 18.

50. John Wain, *Poems 1949-1979*, London, 1980.

51. Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*, London 1951 (rep. 1964) Especially the chapter on 'Freud and literature' pp. 34-58.

52. Carl G. Jung (ed.) *Man and his symbols*, London, 1964, P.59

53. Thom Gunn, *The Passages of Joy*, London 1982, pp. 80-89

54. G. Summerfield (ed.) *Worlds: Seven Modern poets*, London, 1974, pp. 61-2

55. Michael Schmidt, *An Introduction to 50 Modern British poets, London*, 1979, p. 376

56. Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for poetry*, ed. Ezra Pound, San Francisco, 1969, p. 22; cited in Pecorino, *Op. Cit.*, p. 382

57. Schmidt, Op. *Cit., p. 382*

58. *The Times Literary Supplement*, Nov 4, 1983, p. 1226

59. Translated and cited by Clive Scott in *Op. Cit.,* p. 212

60. *Ibid.* pp. 212-3

61. *Ibid.*

62. Summerfield, *Op. Cit.* pp. 243-5

63. Ibid., pp. 248-9

64. *Gaudier-Brzeska,* p.84

65. 'To', Shelley's *Poetical Works,* ed. Thomas Hutchinson. O.U.P., 1967, p. 639

66. *The Prelude,* i. 407, de Selincourt's variorum edition, 1959, p. 24.

67. *Shelley's Works,* p. 569.

68. *The Prelude,* i. 19

69. G. Thurley, *The Ironic Harvest,* London: Arnold, 1974, pp. 143-4

70. C. Tomlinson, 'The Middlebrow Muse', In *Essays in Criticism,* 7, 2 (April 1952), p. 214

71. E. Homberger, *the Art of the Real,* (London: Dent, 1977) p. 74.

72. A. Motion, *Philip Larkin,* London, 1982, p.60

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.* p. 65

76. Cf. F. Kermode's *Romantic Image* where this idea is applied to Yeats.

77. Calvin Bedient, *Eight Contemporary Poets,* O.U.P., 1974, p.73.

78. Schmidt, *Op. Cit.,p.* 335.

79. Bedient, *Op. Cit., p.* 74.

80. David Timms, *Philip Larkin* (Oliver & Boyd : Edinburgh, 1973) p. 106.

81. *Ibid.* p. 108.

82. *Ibid.* The italics are his.

83. Motion, *Op. Cit., p.* 83.

84. Tmms, *Op. Cit., p.* 109.

85. Motion, *Op. Cit. p.* 65.

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